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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000293

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: BLUEBLOOD SHIA CLERIC COMMENTS ON "BACKWARD"
SADRISTS AND SISTANI'S FEARS AND FRUSTRATIONS

REF: 08 JAN 08 BAGHDAD O/I (SELF-PROCLAIMED SISTANI
EMISSARIES)

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Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Scion of a prominent Najafi clerical family and related to both Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Moqtada al-Sadr, Emad Klanter told us January 30 that bumbling Iraqi politicians fail to make progress of any sort but actively encourage a public perception of "American Occupation" through statements to vernacular media. He predicted Sadr would extend his JAM militia freeze order beyond February, and advised that we can change the "backward" Sadrists and contain their movement but only if we adopt a more balanced approach to their arch-enemy ISCI. Klanter pleaded for USG pressure on the GOI and political blocs to hold early provincial elections under an "open list" system, adding that no one but the Sadrists and Sistani are eager for elections. He claimed that his maternal uncle Sistani is alarmed by the degree of Iranian penetration in Iraq and is frustrated by his lack of indirect contact with the USG. Klanter warned that only Sistani and the Marja'iyah can stand up to Iran and Shia extremism, adding that if the USG does not strengthen Sistani, "Iran will devour Iraq." End Summary.

"Our Brains Are In Our Eyes"

12. (C) Son of a respected Najafi Ayatollah, nephew to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, related by marriage to Muqtada al-Sadr, and bearing a faint resemblance to the actor Robert De Niro, Klanter is a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad but was not wearing the traditional Shia Sayyid's garb of black turban and cloak during our meeting at the IZ villa of Saad Jabr, a Saddam-era exile opposition financier and son of Iraq's first Shia Prime Minister. Claiming he had recently met with Prime Minister Maliki, Klanter bemoaned the ineffectuality of Iraq's political leaders and warned that the gap between these leaders and the Iraqi people is growing wider by the day. He stated that while Maliki might be able to entice Iraqiyyah and Tawafuq to rejoin his government, neither ISCI nor the Kurds want anything beyond superficial changes to the status quo. When we informed him that USG patience is wearing thin with the pace of Iraqi political process, Klanter appeared incredulous that the U.S. would even consider scaling-down in Iraq "because you destroyed a regime and now you bear the responsibility to build up a replacement. If you leave there is a 100 percent certainty of civil war, which might happen anyway even if you don't leave." Swinging his arms into an abbreviated "Gator Chomp" type of gesture, he said that if the U.S. leaves "Iran will swallow us whole."

13. (C) Small wonder that the Iraqi people feel as though they

are living under "American Occupation," Klanter maintained, because Iraqi politicians - Shia, Sunni, and Kurds alike - routinely use terms like "occupation" and "occupiers" when referring to the USG presence in Iraq during interviews with local media. The forty-something Shia cleric, who told us he teaches religious classes in Najaf's traditional Shia seminary (Hawzah) and also operates a media-oriented NGO, defied us to name one Iraqi politician who has ever referred to Americans as "friends" in local or Pan-Arab media. When Iraqi politicians talk to Sistani and the Marja'iyah, he continued, "they blame you for all of Iraq's problems, even their own failure to deliver public services." He chided the USG for dealing exclusively with Iraq's political class and ignoring contact with the Iraqi people. Employing an Iraqi proverb that says "our brains are in our eyes", Klanter exclaimed that Iraqis find it almost impossible to believe news reports that the USG has spent billions of dollars in Iraq "since we don't see any buildings or hospitals or structures that you have built here." He chuckled softly when we replied that the important thing is for the Iraqi people to see the GOI constructing buildings and other structures for their benefit.

Sadrists Insights and Elections

¶3. (C) Klanter, whose two brothers are reportedly married to sisters of Moqtada al-Sadr and who claims to maintain good relations with many senior Sadrists, said that Sadr will most likely extend the freeze on his Jaysh al-Mehdi militia beyond its scheduled expiration at the end of February. Characterizing the education level and mentality of most Sadrists as "backward, almost like they are from a cave," Klanter told us the USG can contain such people and change their thinking by "sending them to the U.S. and exposing them to new ideas." In reply to our rejoinder that we seek cordial relations with Sadrists who wish to participate

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peacefully in Iraq's democratic future, Klanter replied that "they hear you say this but then they look at your unbalanced relationship with ISCI and they don't believe your words." Klanter added gratuitously that, in his opinion, ISCI is more dangerous than the Sadrists because it is fronting for Iran. Conceding that some part of Sadr's movement is allied with Iran, he said Moqtada remains popular because "even though he is in Iran, we hear that he is constantly quarreling with the Iranians." Jabr chimed in that the USG has unwittingly driven Sadr into Tehran's arms.

¶4. (C) Klanter pleaded for USG pressure on the GOI and political blocs to hold early provincial elections: such pressure will be needed, he claimed, since no one but the Sadrists and Grand Ayatollah Sistani are eager for elections. Characterizing the 2005 "closed list" electoral system as a failure, Klanter also urged us to push for an "open list" system. He said the Sadrists can live with either an open or closed list system "because they know they have a very loyal base of popular support and they realize they will not be able to attract other voters beyond that base." "Even though I am a man of religion," Klanter asserted, "I don't support religious political parties because they have been shown to be a complete failure in Iraq and in Iran."

Frustrated Sistani Wants More Indirect USG Contact

¶5. (C) Repeating many of the points he made during a January 8 meeting and which he claimed were conveyed to him directly by Sistani (Ref A), Klanter said Sistani's greatest fear is the degree of Iranian penetration in Iraq. He claimed that Sistani is in possession of detailed Iranian plans to dominate Iraq's political, economic, and religious institutions. Klanter added that Sistani wants to know what the USG is planning to do about this (we note that we have heard unsubstantiated reports that Klanter may have ties to

Iranian intelligence and is held at something like arm's length by his maternal uncle Sistani). He said Sistani is now more open to indirect contact with the USG than ever before and is frustrated that previous emissaries were not reliable: we pointed out to Klanter that Fouad Ajami and Ahmad Chalabi, two claimed "emissaries" who Klanter cited by name, are not carrying messages for the USG. He said Sistani's failure to hear from the Americans is leading the Grand Ayatollah to think that there might actually be some merit to a circulating Iraqi public conspiracy theory that the USG and Tehran have done a deal over Iraq. Klanter ended the meeting by warning that only Sistani and the Marja'iyah can stand up to Iran and Shia extremism, adding that if the USG does not support Sistani, "Iran will devour Iraq."

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